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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, April 23, 1937

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

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Subject: "DINNER FOR COMPANY." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Company dinner today certainly isn't what it used to be. Styles even in hospitality have changed.

The other day I ran across the account of a dinner served back in 1861 in Boston. A new pastor was being welcomed to Old South Church. And this is what was served at this church dinner. A good rich plum pudding, boiled pork, a corned leg of pork with sauce, fried chicken, roast veal, roast turkey, a venison pie, cheese cakes and tarts, cheese and butter. Six cooks and 20 waiters were hired for the occasion.

And the guests were not just supposed to choose among those meats and desserts. They were expected to eat some of all six meat dishes, and all three desserts: the plum pudding, the cakes, and the tarts! Not a sign of fresh fruit or of vegetables in all that food line-up. No wonder chronic stomach trouble was common in those days.

The ideal dinner today is simple - whether it has one or many courses. I think we'd all agree that one meat, one dessert dish, shows the best taste.

Undoubtedly this change in dinner styles is due to the nutrition specialists. They have shown us pretty conclusively that the well-balanced simple meal is both the most healthful and the most enjoyable.

Of course even a simple company dinner can be very expensive -- if out-of-season foods and the most expensive meat cuts are served. But excellent dinner even for critical guests can be inexpensive.

Home economists all over the country have been doing a lot of experimental work with the less tender cuts of meat. The Bureau of Home Economics in Washington has published several leaflets telling how to make savory dishes from them. They tell how to stuff a shoulder or breast of lamb or beef, and roast it so that it is good to look at and delicious to eat. Pot roast of beef rightly handled can appear even on the company dinner table with no apology. A carefully prepared Swiss steak is always welcome.

Having chosen your meat, the next thing is to decide how to prepare the potatoes, if you plan to have this vegetable. If you are serving veal outlets or fried liver, or fried fish, then French fried potatoes are out. Definitely. Both those for whom cooking is an art and those for whom it is

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a science would object to making fried meat associate with fried potatoes. The scientist because fried dishes are likely to bring in an over supply of fats and slow up digestion. The artist because two such dishes mean duplication of texture and flavor. If your meat is fried, your potatoes would be better mashed or baked, or even scalloped.

For the same reasons, if you've chosen a creamed meat dish for your dinner you'll not want scalloped potatoes. Again there'd be duplication of food materials and of texture.

Speaking of the importance of having contrast in texture of foods reminds me of a dinner I once ate. The cook was a young bride. And this is what she had for dinner. Latticed fried potatoes, fried bacon and liver, raw cauliflower, crisp raw celery, crusty French rolls, and for dessert macaroons with a dish that had peanut brittle ground up in it. Everything was very nicely prepared and served. But by the time I'd finished, my jaws fairly ached. Just imagine yourself crunching your way through that meal. Fried potatoes, fried bacon, hard rolls, raw cauliflower, crunchy celery, chewy macaroons, hard peanut brittle.

Of course you're not so likely to run into the chewy dinner as you are the pasty one. Such as creamed salmon, mashed potatoes, tomato aspic salad, custard. Nothing to get your teeth into in that dinner!

Not only should there be contrast in texture in a meal, but also contrast of flavor. If the meat is fat, you need something tart and crisp to balance it. For instance, a vegetable salad that has some snap to it.

Of course you can have pickles. They used to be considered a dinner essential, especially during the winter, simply because there were no fresh vegetables available. But food specialists today prefer to use vegetables to bring in the contrasting flavor. Vegetables are necessary in the well-balanced diet, whereas pickles have nothing to recommend them but their flavor.

Contrast in color as well as in flavor and texture is found in the well-planned meal. Just try to visualize this colorless one. Creamed chicken, mashed potatoes, buttered turnips, celery, rice pudding. No color anywhere. Just white. Then try to picture this, with its accent notes of bright color: brown Swiss steak, fluffy white mashed potatoes sprinkled with green chopped parsley leaves, buttered yellow carrot strips, shredded green leaf-lettuce salad with French dressing, whole wheat rolls, and butter -- and for dessert the bright pink of rhubarb betty. Pretty, isn't it?

And it's well balanced dietetically, too. There's steak for your protein dish, rolls and potatoes for the cereal and starchy foods, carrots and lettuce for your vitamin-rich foods -- butter for the fat you need to balance the starches, and fruit.

To sum it all up: The well-planned dinner has a variety but not a duplication of the food types. It has contrast of flavor, of color, and of texture. And above all, it is simple. If served with an accompaniment of hospitality and good cheer, such a dinner should please even the most critical guest.
